DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 868 CS 501 997

AUTHOR Florio-Forslund, Evelyn
TITLE The Application of a Communication Model to the Problems of Learning Disabled Children.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 31p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Attitudes; *Changing Attitudes; *Classroom Communication; Delinquency; Delinquency Causes; Elementary Secondary Education; *Exceptional Child Education; *Learning Disabilities; *Models; *Self Concept

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problems of learning disabled children and discusses possibilities for improving their self-concept and attitude toward school. It first notes the suspected link between juvenile delinquency and learning disabilities and suggests that initial efforts to help learning disabled children be directed at the lower-class urban school population. It then defines learning disabilities and shows how learning disabled children become frustrated by standard school requirements, explores the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement as it pertains to learning disabled children, and shows how communication strategies used by teachers affect children's self-concept and attitudes. Finally, the paper examines models representing attitude and belief formation and proposes a model that may be used to show how a change in the learning environment can have a direct influence on the self-concept of learning disabled children, which in turn influences their beliefs and subsequently their attitudes toward the learning environment. Several research questions derived from the model are listed. (GW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Application of a Communication Model to the Problems of Learning Disabled Children

by Evelyn Florio-Forslund

ED151868

INTRODUCTION

An interest in the problems and characteristics of learning disabled children has recently emerged in the social sciences. This emphasis is, in part, due to the possible link between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency (Ozer and Dworkin, 1974; Mauser, 1974; Hogenson, 1974). This concern is reflected in a recent report by the U.S. Comptroller to Congress. The report states that growing evidence indicates a correlation between children with learning problems and children demonstrating delinquent behavior patterns. This evidence further indicates that children with learning problems run a risk of turning to delinquency and crime to find the successes they failed to achieve within the public schools (Comptroller General, 1977). The report further suggests that it is the child with learning disabilities who most often experiences failure in a regular classroom environment. This failure usually results in a lowered self-concept and a negative attitude toward school (Mauser, 1974; Knaus and McKeever, 1977). It is the purpose of this paper to investigate the problems of learning disabled children and to illustrate how a communication model can effect changes in their self concept and attitude toward the learning environment. In addition, the heuristic potentials of the model will be set forth.

Educational systems typically operate on the assumption that skill acquisition (such as reading or writing) is of primary

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Evelyn Florio-Forslund

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CS501997

importance and must precede all other school activities (Senf and Sushinsky, 1975). Because of a perceptual handicap, the learning disabled child is unable to learn these skills and finds the learning situation frustrating and punishing. The learning disabled child watches as his/her classmates read from the blackboard with ease, express themselves orally and follow the teacher's instructions with little or no problem. For such a child, the accomplishment of these tasks can appear monumental. As the learning experience evolves into a process involving more complicated material, the child's frustration grows until he/she can no longer tolerate the classroom environment. For the learning disabled child, the ability to tolerate frustrating situations is lower than for normal children (CANHC Newsletter, 1976). The learning disabled child may respond by withdrawal or behavior inappropriate for the situation (i.e., the learning environment).

Unless preventive measures, including more effective communication behaviors in the classroom, are taken within the educational system to alleviate such frustration, this withdrawal may eventually lead the child to other activities in which his/her self concept is not threatened and frustration is at a minimum. One such activity may involve the learning disabled child in juvenile delinquent acts.

In a survey conducted by the Sonoma County Probation Department, it was found that 56% of a total of 195 juvenile hall detainees

within a normal IQ range had learning disabilities. In addition, 80% of second offenders referred to the juvenile detention center were found to have learning disabilities (Miller, 1977).

Mauser (1974) reports that truancy is one of the most frequently cited behavioral manifestations of juvenile delinquents. One of the most common descriptions associated with juvenile delinquents' attitudes has been a dislike of school and teachers. In particular, this dislike tends to focus on school subjects requiring strict logical reasoning, persistency of effort, and memorization. These educational deficiencies also are characteristic of children termed learning disabled. Mauser also discusses a variety of characteristics which are common to both juvenile delinquents and learning disabled children.

The similarity of characteristics of juvenile delinquent and learning disabled children is also stressed in the Comptroller General's Report to Congress (1977). The Report states that growing evidence is being established by experts in education, medicine, law enforcement, justice and juverile corrections which indicates a correlation between children with learning problems and children expressing delinquent behavior patterns. The Report further indicates that the role of the school is of primary importance in any concerted effort to ameliorate the problem.

Initial efforts should be directed at the lower class urban school population in light of the deficiencies of funds in these areas as compared to more affluent areas. The Comptroller's Report (1977) assessed the effectiveness of school programs in

dealing with learning disabilities in three states (Virginia, Colorado, and Texas). It was found that the primary difference in adequacy of programs was not between states, but rather the largest disparity occurred within the states between school districts. This discrepancy manifested itself in the percentage of children served in affluent versus low income districts (i.e., funds set aside for testing, special programs, resources, etc.).

A second reason for initially working with urban poor schools is that parents in such areas often do not have the time or energy to devote to understanding their learning disabled child's problems. According to Byrne (1977), parents of children in more affluent areas have the time and energy to become involved in their child's problems. Often they become change agents and organize into such groups as the California Association for Neurologically Handicapped Children (CANHC). However, in urban poor areas, parents are concerned with more primary needs such as feeding, clothing and housing their children. A note coming home with Johnny indicating that he is a slow reader would not cause the same degree of concern in a urban poor parent who is concerned with how to pay the rent as it would to a parent to whom these primary needs are fulfilled (Maslow, 1954).

According to Hunter (1977), the quality of teaching may be just as inadequate in an affluent area as in an urban poor area. However, there is one difference: in an affluent area a youngster

has a chance to learn at home, while in a poverty area, the classroom may be his/her only chance to learn.

A further reason for studying learning disabilities in an urban setting concerns the juvenile delinquency-learning disabilities link. Mauser (1974) states that arrests of white juveniles outnumber arrests of black juveniles three to one for persons under eighteen years of age. He points out, however, that white juveniles are arrested mainly for crimes involving damage to property while black juveniles are arrested mainly for vice, prostitution, and violent crimes against other persons. The destructiveness of these crimes to the victim, the offender and society emphasizes the importance of studying the possible learning disabilities-juvenile delinquency link in urban areas.

Specifically, communication researchers could focus on communication strategies which would seek to enhance the self concept and lower the frustration of learning disabled children in the learning situation and improve attitudes of these children toward the classroom environment and learning situation. Concentration on the reduction of problems associated with learning disabilities may be one means of improving attitudes toward the learning situation and concurrently decreasing the propensity for delinquent behavior.

Definition of Learning Disabilities

There are varying approaches to defining learning disability. Cook (1973) and Abrams (1975) suggest that the controversy over

definition could be settled by leaving the finer distinctions between types of learning disabilities to medical authorities with educators emphasizing an approach which would treat the symptoms of poor progress without worrying greatly about which causative factor is primary.

For purposes of this paper, specific variations of learning disabilities will not be emphasized. Rather, learning disabilities are defined as an inability to process symbolic information. This inability to process symbolic information is the result of a perceptual handicap. This handicap is not manifested physically or through intelligence tests for learning disabled children are typically of normal intelligence and are not physically handicapped. Consequently, they are difficult to identify. A perceptual handicap refers to an impairment of the basic ability to cope with and make sense out of the environment. It affects the way in which the child perceives the world and the way in which the child thinks about what he/she perceives. When a child enters school, this handicap becomes relevant.

In school, the child is expected to make sense out of a variety of incoming verbal and written stimuli. The learning disabled child has difficulty forming and organizing these stimuli. This difficulty may be manifested in a variety of ways. For example, the learning disabled child may overlook important details or focus on them so strongly that he/she misses the whole; he/she may grasp

aspects of the whole but not their relationships or the whole itself; the child may hear meanings but fail to attend to word structure; he/she may transpose letters and have difficulty writing. Regardless of the specific type of disability, these children are expected to function in a regular classroom situation which frustrates the perceptually handicapped child.

For such children, written English becomes a foreign language. Frustration builds in a child who knows no matter how hard he/she tries, he/she is going to fail, that people are going to make fun of him/her. For such a child, especially a child with an above average IQ, it may be much easier to act out frustration (e.g., get kicked out of class, sent to the principal, etc.) than to admit to peers their academic inabilities. Communication strategies used in the classroom may serve to enhance or decrease such frustration.

Self Concept

The one characteristic used by experts to describe learning disabled children is the variability of their behavior (McDonnell, 1975). According to CANHC (1976), the perceptually handicapped child may do some things very well and others poorly. In light of inconsistent and unpredictable successes, the child's failures may be explained by his/her teacher as being motivational or attitudinal such as "Johnny could do it if he would only try harder" or "Suzy has a poor attitude." These comments impact on the learning disabled child's self concept.

The relationship between self-concept and academic achievement has been addressed in several studies (Stuckey, 1975; McDonnell, 1975; Knaus and McKeever, 1977; Coopersmith, 1967; McKeown, 1976). These studies have repeatedly shown that the poor academic achievement of learning disabled children affects their self concept.

According to Stuckey (1975), self concept theorists believe that we cannot understand and predict human behavior unless we have knowledge of an individual's perception of his/her environment and of him/herself. Thus, self concept is an important consideration in predicting a child's attitude toward the learning situation.

McDonnell (1975) states that two meanings have evolved from the concept of self. The first of these, self as process, relates to an individual's perception of his/her environment. Here the contention is that a person's self-concept is at least partially formed for him/her by people in the environment who are significant others (i.e., parents, teachers, peers).

The second meaning deals with self as object and was utilized by Coopersmith (1967) is his self-esteem research. In his model, the self is conceptualized as:

> "an abstraction that an individual develops about the attributes, capacities, objects and activities which he possesses and pursues. This abstraction is represented by the symbol 'me' which is a person's idea of himself to himself."

As an extension of this approach, self-esteem in Coopersmith's model is viewed as a "subjective experience resulting in a personal judgment of worthiness expressed in the individual's attitude toward himself as an object and expressed to others through behavior." The basis of this judgment is the beliefs the individuals hold of themselves. Following from this same line of research, Coopersmith identified four conditions or experiences of the regular classroom child associated with self-attitude. These are: successes, defenses, values, and aspirations.

Because of his/her perceptual handicap, the learning disabled child has limited success in the classroom. McDonnell (1975) reviewed seventeen studies dealing with the success/failure of school-aged children. These studies all found a persistent, significant relationship between self-concept and academic achievement with high achievers exhibiting more positive evaluations of self than low achievers. In addition, as a child matures, and if the child continues to experience academic failure, he/she may not only hold negative feelings toward self, but may encompass in those feelings the peers and adults in his/her environment. This would assume that the significant others are contributing to the negative self evaluations of the child.

The second of the four conditions is possession of adequate defenses or ability to cope with one's environment. The effects of anxiety depend upon the strength of the child's defenses (ie.,

feelings about self, feelings toward the specific anxiety-producing situation, and degree of anxiety experienced). Normal children have the comfort of past successes to fall back upon (defenses) in times of anxiety. For the learning disabled child, who operates from a history of failure, such defenses are not available.

Coopersmith's third condition concerns the exposure of children to values. In the school environment, the communication strategies employed by teachers are instrumental in shaping the child's character and self concept. The values condition is a function of the self as process view that a person's self concept is partially formed by significant others in the child's environment. The teacher's effect would be more pronounced in the earlier grades where significant others in the child's life would predominantly be parents and teachers. By the time such a learning disabled child becomes a teenager, the importance of parents and teachers as significant others may be diminished. Peer groups may assume primary importance especially for the learning disabled child for whom the school experience continues to be a frustrating experience. This child may seek "successful" situations outside of school. Such a situation might involve the child in delinquent activities.

McDonnell (1975) states that a child enters school with a value attached to him/herself, which is based on experiences at home with parents, relatives and friends. This value has <u>not</u> been based

on the academic achievement of the child which will assume the basis of the child's value in the school environment. Whether that value remains the same or changes, either positively or negatively, depends on the child's perception of him/herself in the school environment. Not only must the child know he/she is capable, the child must also believe in his/her capabilities. In the school setting, the teacher, through communication strategies, is primarily responsible for enhancing the child's feeling of worth both as a person and as a student. If a learning disabled child is exposed to a school environment where he/she is not made to feel good about him/herself as a person and as a student, this child may exhibit a lower evaluation of self and a negative attitude toward school.

The fourth condition in Coopersmith's model concerns aspirations as related to self-attitude. The role of the teacher is also stressed in this condition. Research indicates that a child's future aspirations are dependent on his/her feelings about present performance (McDonnell, 1975). These feelings are affected by the child's perception of the teacher's evaluation of his/her academic performance and how these evaluations are communicated by the teacher. For the learning disabled child whose feelings about present performance are negative, positive reinforcement from the teacher assumes great importance. The effect of these four conditions on the learning disabled child's self concept is dependent on the school environment and the teacher's role.

Communication Strategies

Combs and Syngg (cited in Stuckey, 1975) state that of all our societal agencies only the family has more effect on the development of an individual's self concept than the school. They state:

> "The learning of any skill or item of subject matter is accomplished by the formation of attitudes by the pupil toward the subject, toward school, toward his teacher, toward teachers in general, toward adults, toward society, and toward himself which may be desirable or undesirable. As a result, how subject matter is taught may be even more important than what is taught." (Stuckey, pg. 43) [Emphasis added]

How the student/is taught (i.e., communication strategies employed by the teacher) effects the child's self concept and attitudes. For the learning disabled child whose evaluation of self is in jeopardy in the learning situation, the communication strategy employed by the teacher may serve as an aid or a detriment to the development of self concept and attitude.

The communication strategies employed by the teacher dictate the environment in the classroom. A review of the literature indicates two general communication strategies employed by teachers. For purposes of this paper, these two strategies are labeled the interpersonally oriented strategy and the role oriented strategy.

These two terms are drawn from research conducted by Kowitz, Goldie and Forslund (1976). They identified a role oriented approach to problem resolution as one in which communication

strategies are based on external rules which are determined by traditional role prescriptions. Rules are defined as external to the degree that they are imposed on the interactants from external sources. The interpersonally oriented approach places emphasis on internal rules which emerge during the specific interaction. Rules are considered internal to the degree that they are generated by the interactants themselves. This distinction between external and internal rules reflects the treatment of rules by Miller and Steinberg (1975). Communicative behavior between interactants is role oriented to the extent that the rules are situationally determined, and interpersonally oriented to the degree that rules can be attributed to the participants themselves (Miller and Steinberg, 1975).

These two approaches are discussed by educational scholars under various labels. Wilson (1976) terms the role oriented approach as "universalism" and defines it as "a norm which requires people to interact with each other in terms of their organizational roles and of objective assessments of their behavior rather than in terms of personal characteristics or personal relationships." The form of interaction is defined in terms of traditional roles. In the study described by Wilson (1976), teachers at an alternative high school sought to deemphasize these role-specific norms. In essence, they attempted to shift the bases of their communication strategies from role oriented to interpersonally oriented rules.

Lehane and Goldman (1976) use the terms "formal" and "informal" learning environments. In the formal environment, the role oriented approach is emphasized. Here the teacher utilizes well-planned lectures, questions and recitations to achieve specific learning objectives. In the informal or interpersonally oriented environment, the adult (teacher) deliberately organizes the environment with the intent of building a stimulating situation to attract children for the purpose of learning. In other words, the situation fits the individual student's needs. Here the teacher individualizes learning by adapting to the learning style of each student. Lehane and Goldman (1976) state that the formal environment predominates in the school setting, although it is questionable whether it can carry the full burden of learning in the school.

Abrams (1975) suggests that the most well thought out traditional learning strategies which rely on the role oriented approach can have little impact if interpersonal relationship patterns are impersonal, insincere or patronizing. The manner in which contact with the child is maintained determines the success or failure of anything else.

Sherman, Brophy, Evertson, and Crawford (1976) identified through factor analysis a variety of behaviors which they term the "traditional" approach to teaching. Two hundred teachers were administered a battery of questionnaires containing 495 items dealing with a broad spectrum of teacher beliefs, attitudes and practices. The factor analysis revealed only one clear cut

factor which is the one they termed traditionalism. Behaviors identified by this factor are illustrative of what Abrams (1975) would term impersonal behaviors. These behaviors illustrate the role oriented approach to communication in the classroom. The behaviors identified which would be most harmful to the learning disabled child in a traditional classroom environment include: (1) insistence that students stay in place and work; (2) insistence that students rigidly follow a planned schedule; (3) belief that low grades reinforce a student to work harder; (4) requirement that students stand while reciting; (5) belief that teachers should spend more time talking to the whole class rather than to individuals. A classroom environment in which such behaviors are emphasized is certain to result in frustration for the learning disabled child.

In the traditional school environment, the emphasis is toward homogenization of students (i.e., treat them all alike). This would involve a role oriented approach to communication in the classroom. However, learning disabled experts posit that a supportive, interpersonally oriented classroom environment is essential to the successes of the learning disabled child. For example, Knaus and McKeever (1977) suggest that teachers implement self-help strategies which involve interpersonal communication between student and teacher in dealing with learning disabled children. Lehane and Goldman (1976) present a model which can be used by teachers seeking to establish a more interpersonally oriented environment which would be conducive to the learning disabled child.

"Dehandicapping" children is the strategy emphasized by Senf and Sushinsky (1975). They suggest that individual differences not be viewed as deficits but rather as positive legitimate features of children. The uniqueness of each child should be a primary concern in the learning environment.

McDonnell (1975) discusses the humanistic and behavoristic approaches to learning and cites studies supporting each of them. She concludes that compared to the relationship established between the child and the teacher, the specific approach has little impact. It is the interpersonal interaction which makes the difference.

The communication strategies employed by the teacher shape the classroom environment. The role of the teacher and classroom environment assume particular importance for the learning disabled child. The particular communication strategy employed by a teacher represents a series of persuasive messages aimed at inducing the children to learn. The teacher may utilize dissonance producing techniques, counterattitudinal advocacy or any combination of persuasive techniques to persuade the child to learn. However, the environment (role or interpersonal) in which these techniques are applied may determine their success or failure, especially for learning disabled children.

Theoretical Orientation

The self concept construct was discussed in an earlier section of this paper. Explication of the attitude construct will

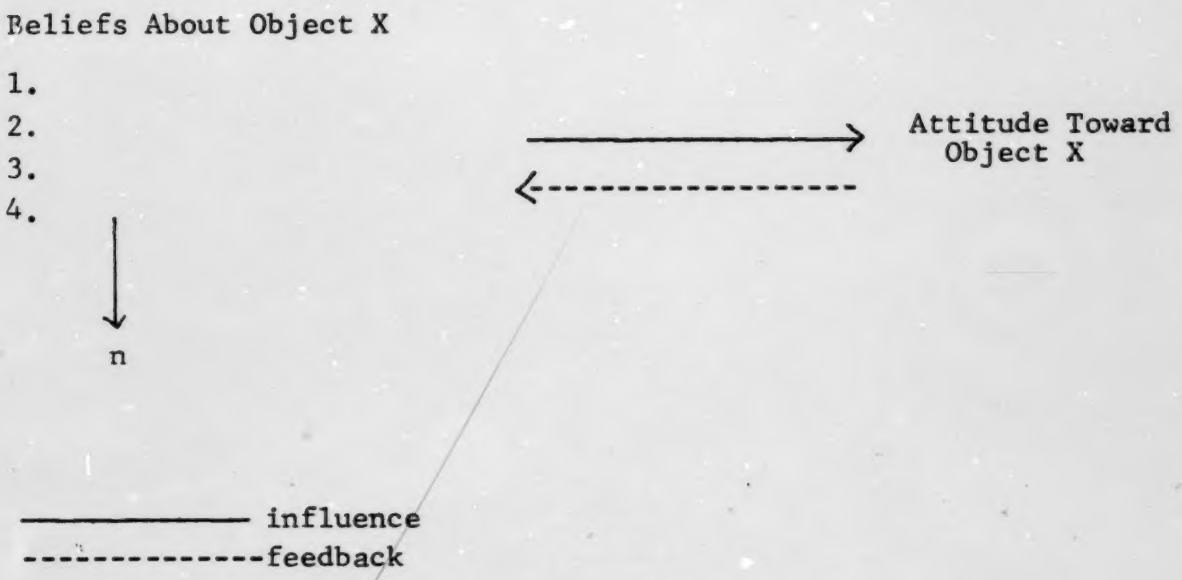
be based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) model of attitude formation and on Rokeach's (1960) notion of the organization of belief systems. A model proposed by Rosenblatt, Cheatham and Watt (1977) will be utilized to integrate these two approaches.

Fishbein and Ajzen's attitude model is based on a learning theory orientation. In an analysis of learning theories, Fishbein and Ajzen state that these theories make reference to stimulus-response conditioning processes. They suggest that S-R bonds established in the learning paradigm correspond to what they term "beliefs". Such an approach seems appropriate for the investigation of learning disabilities in that learning disabled children form, through negative reinforcement of their academic achievements (which results in negative self evaluation), negative beliefs about the school which in turn results in a negative attitude toward school. An examination of Fishbein and Ajzen's model of attitude formation should illustrate this process (Figures 1 and 2).

The basis of their model is the distinction between beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs form the conceptual foundation in the model. As can be seen, attitude toward an object (i.e., school) is related to beliefs about the object. How a belief is formed would therefore affect attitude.

Fishbein (1963, cited in Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) defined beliefs in terms of the probability that a given object is related

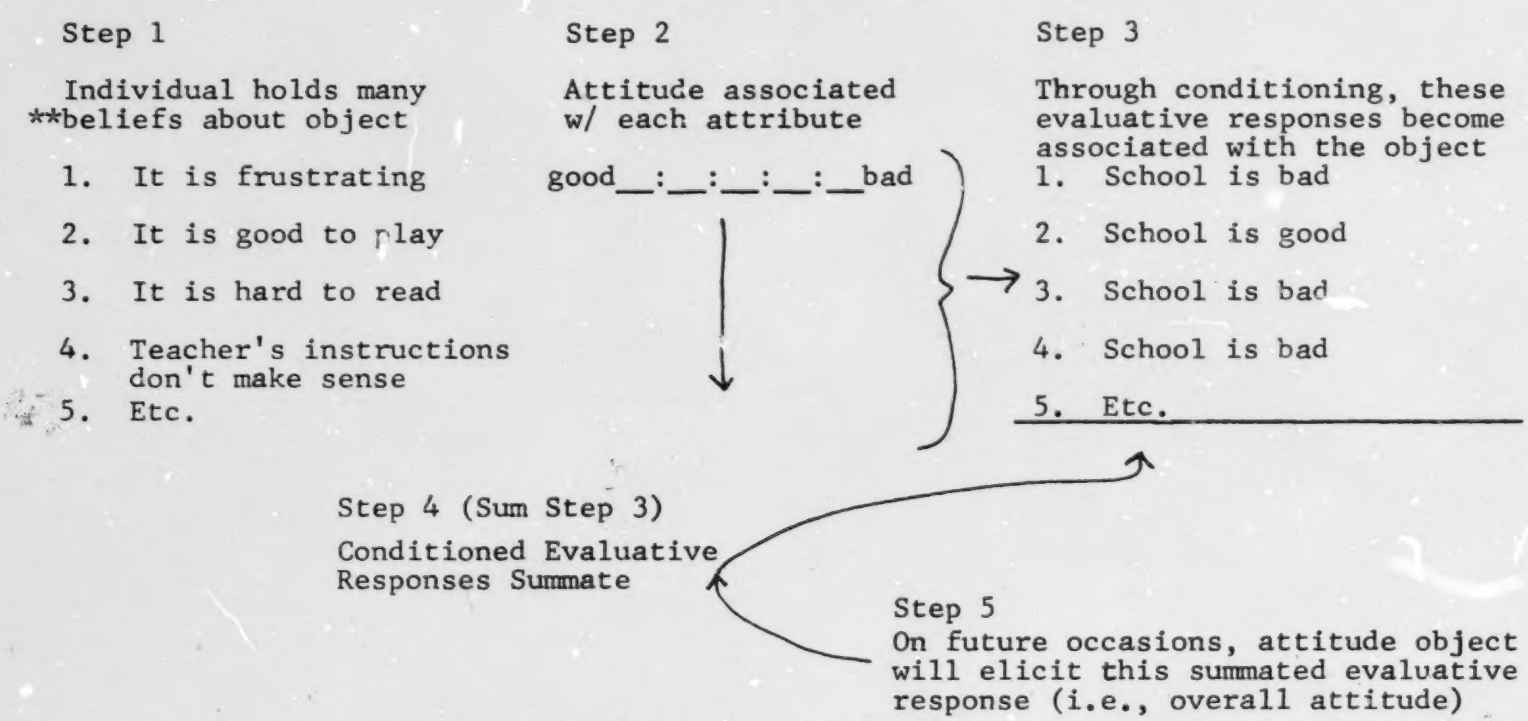
FIGURE 1



From Fishbein and Ajzen, pg. 15

FIGURE 2

Model of Attitude Formation ($A_o = b_i e_i$)*


Step 1
Individual holds many **beliefs about object
1. It is frustrating
2. It is good to play
3. It is hard to read
4. Teacher's instructions don't make sense
5. Etc.
Step 2
Attitude associated w/ each attribute
good__:__:__:__:__bad
Step 3
Through conditioning, these evaluative responses become associated with the object
1. School is bad
2. School is good
3. School is bad
4. School is bad
5. Etc.
Step 4 (Sum Step 3)
Conditioned Evaluative Responses Summate
Step 5
On future occasions, attitude object will elicit this summated evaluative response (i.e., overall attitude)

* $A_o = \sum_{i}^{n} b_i e_i$

A = Attitude toward object
b = one belief about object
e.= evaluation of one attribute
n = number of beliefs

** A person's attitude toward object is related to a set of beliefs about object, but not necessarily to any specific belief.

to some attribute. By viewing the object (school) as the stimulus and related attribute (e.g., difficulty) as a response, a belief (school is hard) about an object (school) corresponds to the probability that the stimulus elicits the response. This one response does not necessarily indicate the individual's overall attitude toward school in that a person's attitude is related to a set of beliefs about an object and not necessarily to any one specific belief (figure 2).

One drawback to Fishbein and Ajzen's model is that they do not clearly conceptualize belief formation. They do identify two types of beliefs -- descriptive and inferential. Descriptive beliefs deal with directly observable events while inferential beliefs rely on the individual's past experiences. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) themselves state that the distinction between descriptive and inferential beliefs is somewhat arbitrary. Their conceptualization is lacking in adequately explaining belief formation.

Fishbein and Ajzen state that once established, an attitude may influence formation of new beliefs (feedback in Figure 1). Although Fishbein and Ajzen do not specify the dimensions of beliefs in the model, they do discuss the fact that an individual's most salient beliefs affect attitude formation. However, how these salient beliefs are formed is not determined. Rokeach (1960) provides a description of the organization of belief systems which

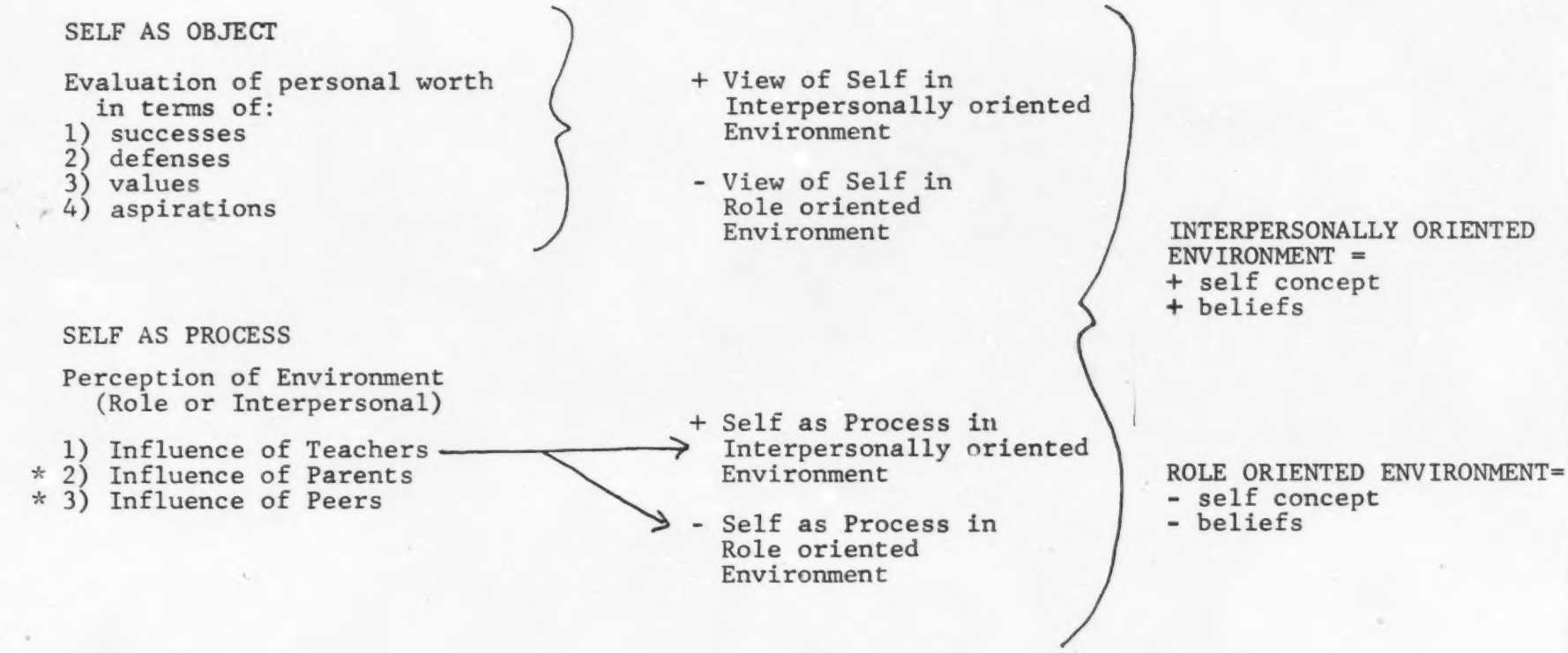
can serve to explain belief formation. He identified three types of beliefs: primitive, intermediate and peripheral.

Following from Rokeach's orientation, we might say that an individual's most salient beliefs are his/her primitive beliefs. One aspect of primitive beliefs concerns a person's social world which includes the person's self concept and conception of others (Rokeach, 1960). Thus, these beliefs are affected by an individual's (in this instance a learning disabled child) evaluation of self (Figure 3).

In Figure 2, the learning disabled child has both negative and positive beliefs about school (object). The negative beliefs (beliefs related to learning in the classroom) may assume the greatest salience in determining the learning disabled child's attitude toward school. For example, Griffiths (1975) found that experiences related to the learning process lead the learning disabled child to negatively evaluate him/herself. A rating of self concept by a group of learning disabled children indicated that although they liked their names, liked to try new things, liked to work with others, felt they had lots of energy, and were satisfied with their body, they believed they were not as smart as others, did poorly in school, and could not read well. These negative aspects form the basis of the child's (and society's) evaluation of his/her success or failure in school. Thus, positive beliefs about school such as playing sports, working with others, etc., may not be the most salient beliefs forming attitude toward

FIGURE 3

Self-Concept Model


SELF AS OBJECT
Evaluation of personal worth in terms of:
1) successes
2) defenses
3) values
4) aspirations
+ View of Self in Interpersonally oriented Environment
- View of Self in Role oriented Environment
INTERPERSONALLY ORIENTED ENVIRONMENT =
+ self concept
+ beliefs
SELF AS PROCESS
Perception of Environment (Role or Interpersonal)
1) Influence of Teachers
* 2) Influence of Parents
* 3) Influence of Peers
+ Self as Process in Interpersonally oriented Environment
- Self as Process in Role oriented Environment
ROLE ORIENTED ENVIRONMENT=
- self concept
- beliefs

*No predictions made

school. Several studies (Stuckey, 1975; McDonnell, 1975; Kanus and McKeever, 1977; Coopersmith, 1967; McKeown, 1976) have shown the importance of academic achievement in creating a positive attitude toward self and school.

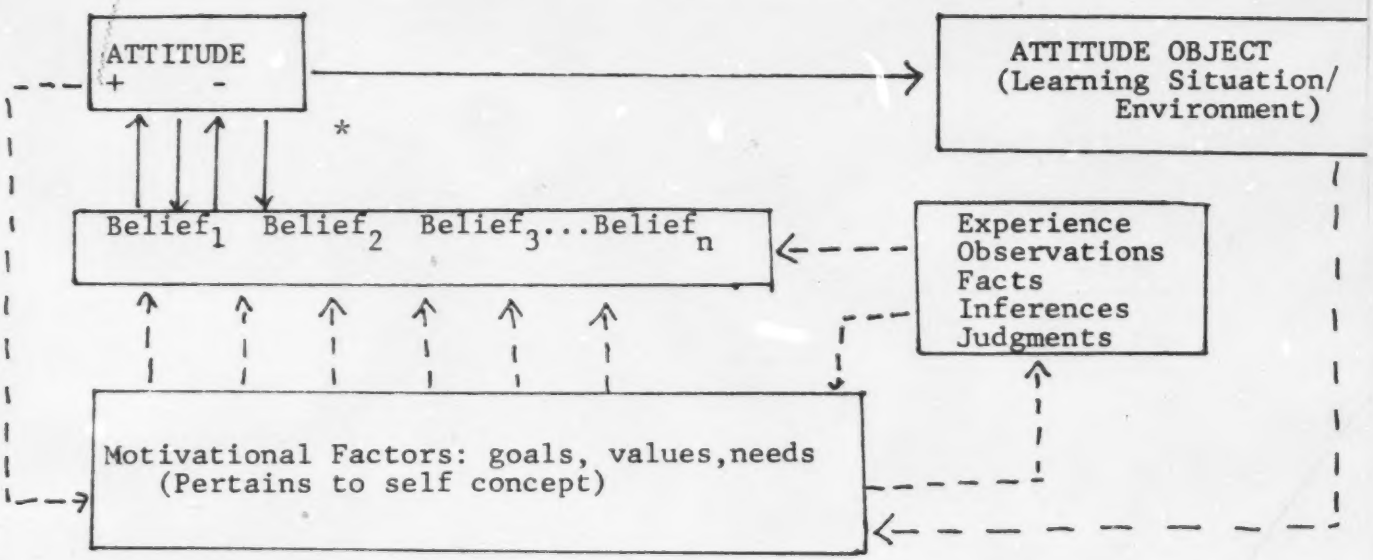
In the Griffiths (1975) study, one finding indicated that the learning disabled children believed they were not as smart as others. However, this was an inaccurate appraisal in that they were all of average or above intelligence. Such inaccurate appraisals may result in these children holding beliefs about themselves such as "I am dumb," "I do bad in school," "I don't understand." Such negative self-evaluations may take precedence over more positive evaluations such as "I am a good kicker" in the formation of beliefs about school. A change in the more salient negative beliefs based on negative evaluations of self in the learning environment should result in a more positive self concept and attitude toward the learning situation.

A person's appraisal of self in a certain situation would assuredly affect his/her beliefs about that situation thus affecting his/her attitude. This is the process presented in Figure 4. Fishbein and Ajzen's model is extended to include components of beliefs. Figure 3 is an elaboration of the effects of self concept on belief formation.

Rosenblatt, Cheatham and Watt (1977) present a model of attitude formation which is similar to my conceptualization.

FIGURE 4

ADAPTATION OF ROSENBLATT, CHEATHAM & WATT'S
MODEL OF ATTITUDE FORMATION



*Fishbein and Ajzen's model of Attitude Formation would be operative here (see Figure 2)

———— = extent of Fishbein and Ajzen's model

---------- = addition of other factors

Figure 4 is my elaboration of their model. Seen within this framework, the importance of the self concept of learning disabled children in affecting attitude change is apparent. Also, the model illustrates the direct effect of the attitude object on self concept. Thus, a change in the attitude object (the learning environment) through the use of interpersonally or role oriented communication strategies can have a direct influence on self concept, which in turn would influence beliefs and subsequently attitude toward the object.

This model offers a new approach to understanding and solving the problems of learning disabled children. Several research questions can be derived from the model. An initial research endeavor might establish the components of Fishbein and Ajzen's model of attitude formation ($A = \sum b_i e_i$). Other research questions which could be addressed include:

1) Is there a correlation between self concept and attitude toward the learning situation?
2) Is there a relationship between correlations (if found in #1 above) for learning disabled and normal children?
3) Are the communication strategies employed in an interpersonally oriented classroom environment conducive to enhancing the learning disabled child's evaluation of self?

4) Do communication strategies utilized in a role oriented environment result in a lowered evaluation of self?

5) Do communication strategies employed affect attitude of learning disabled children toward the learning situation?

6) Determination of most effective persuasive strategies in an interpersonally oriented environment.

Determination of the effects of communication strategies utilized by teachers on the successes of learning disabled children offers to communication researchers an opportunity to conduct timely and socially relevant research. Perhaps such input from the communication field would focus the attention of educators dealing with the problems of learning disabled children in a useful direction. While the content of learning is related to specific subject areas, the process of learning is essentially one of communication. The expertise of communication scholars could certainly add to the understanding and resolution of problems specific to learning disabled children.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, Jules C. Minimal brain dysfunction and dyslexia, Reading World, 1975, 14 (3), 219-227.

Byrne, Dr. Richard, personal interview, November 1977.

California Association for Neurologically Handicapped Children Newsletter, Have you ever known a perceptually handicapped child?, 1976.

Comptroller General of the United States, Learning disabilities: the link to delinquency should be determined but schools should do more now, Report to the Congress, GGD-76-97, March 4, 1977.

Cook, J.W., Dyslexia: a critical comment, Association of Educational Psychologists Journal and Newsletter, 1973, 3 (3), 51-60.

Coopersmith, Stanley, The Antecedents of Self-Esteem. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1967.

Fishbein, Martin and Ajzen, Icek, Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975.

Griffiths, Anita, Self-concepts of dyslexic children, Academic Therapy, 1975, 11(1), 83-90.

Hogenson, Dennis L., Reading failure and juvenile delinquency, Bulletin of the Orton Society, 1974, 24, 164-169.

Hunter, Madeline, Comments in "Madeline and Robert Hunter," Los Angeles Times Home Supplement, November 13, 1977.

Knaus, William and McKeever, Cynthia, Rational-emotive education with learning disabled children, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1977, 10(1), 10-14.

Kowitz, Albert C., Goldie, Charles and Forslund, Evelyn, The effects of two methods of problem resolution on employee's self-esteem, perception of supervisor's credibility, and attraction toward supervisor, Paper presented at the Western Speech-Communication Association Annual Convention, November, 1976.

Lehane, Stephen and Goldman, Richard, An adaptive model for individualizing young children's learning, Elementary School Journal, 1976, 76(6), 373-380.

Maslow, Abraham H., Motivation and Personality, 2nd Ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1954.

Mauser, August, Learning disabilities and delinquent youth, Academic Therapy, 1974, 9 (6), 389-402.

McDonnell, Mary K., The comparative effects of teacher reinforcement of self esteem and of academic achievement on affective variables and achievement in learning disabled children, Unpublished Ed.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, August, 1974.

McKeown, Robin, Modifying student's perceptions of school ability and role through classroom intervention, Journal of Experimental Education, 1976, 45(2), 27-32.

Miller, Anthony O., Sonoma County Probation Department expands testing of children for learning disabilities, Juvenile Justice Digest, April 8, 1977, pg. 6.

Miller, Gerald A. and Steinberg, Mark, Between People. Palo Alto: Science Research Associates, 1975.

Ozer, Mark and Dworkin, Nancy, The assessment of children with learning problems: an in-service teacher training program, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1974, 7(9), 539-544.

Rokeach, Milton, The Open and Closed Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1960.

Rosenblatt, S. Bernard, Cheatham, T. Richard and Watt, James T., Communication in Business. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977.

Senf, Gerald and Sushinsky, Leonard W., State initiative in learning disabilities: Illinois' project SCREEN, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1975, 8(8), 524-533.

Sherman, Gael J., Brophy, Jere E., Evertson, Carolyn M. and Crawford, W. John, Traditional attitudes and teacher consistency in producing student learning gains in the early elementary grades, Journal of School Psychology, 1976, 14(3), 192-201.

Stuckey, Alanna, Self-concept of elementary school students as related to grade level patterns of decrease and reading achievement, Unpublished Ed.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1975.

Wilson, Stephen, You can talk to teachers: student-teacher relations in an alternative high school, Teacher's College Record, 1976, 78(1), 77-100.